

GOD'S NEARNESS TO US

NO. 1973

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 17, 1887,

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Though He is not far from every one of us."

Acts 17:27.

WHEN man disobeyed his God he died spiritually, and that death consisted in the separation of his soul from God. From that moment man began to think that God was far away, and this has since been his religion in all ages. Either he has said, "There is no God," or he has believed the visible creation to be God, which is much the same as having no God; or else he has thought God to be some far-away, mysterious Being, who takes no note of man. Even after obtaining a better conception of God, he has thought Him hard to find and hard to be entreated of. Because his own heart is far from God, he imagines that God's heart is far from him. But it is not so. The living God is not far from any one of us, for "In Him we live, and move, and have our being."

The nearness of God to man is a teaching of revelation. Look back to the record of the Garden of Eden, and see an early evidence there of God's nearness to man. Adam, having transgressed, hid himself among the trees of the garden, but in his hiding place God sought him, and the voice of the Lord God was heard, walking among the trees of the garden, and saying, "Adam, where are you?" Man will not seek God, but God seeks man. Though man's voice is not, "Where is my God?" yet God's voice is, "Adam, where are you?" All through history God has been familiar with man. He has spoken to him in divers ways, but principally through chosen men. One after another He has raised up prophets, and by their warning voices He has pleaded with men, and invited them to seek His face. His own voice might have caused dismay and distance, and so He has used human voices, that He might come nearer to the heart. All the history of the chosen nation, as we read it in the Old Testament, reveals the nearness of Jehovah; whatever we read upon the page, we know that within, above, or behind it, the Lord is near, even when He seems to have hidden Himself. In these latter days, the Lord has come nearer to us still, for He has spoken to us by His Son. The Son of God became the Friend of sinners; could He come nearer than that? The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men, and men beheld His glory. Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh is the Christ, and yet He is very God of very God. In Him God is next-of-kin to man, and manhood is brought near to the eternal throne. Christ Jesus is God and man in one person, and thus the closest union is formed between God and man. Verily, verily, the Lord God is not far from each one of us in His own dear Son.

Today, though Jesus has gone up on high, the Spirit of God abides in the midst of the church, and thus again the Lord is near. The Comforter is at work still; the Convincer still presses upon man's conscience sin, righteousness, and judgment to come. Still does the Holy Spirit work with the Word of God, directing His ministers so to speak that their hearers shall perceive a personality and pointedness in the word delivered. Oh, you that hear the gospel, be you sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near unto you in a very special sense! I may say of you with an emphasis, "He is not far from any of you, and you are not far from the kingdom."

That God is near by His omnipresence and by His gracious dealings with men, is the clear teaching of the inspired volume. To the enlightened mind, God is evidently seen to be near in the works of nature. Whose voice was it that we heard last night thundering overhead? Who fashioned the drops of rain that refreshed the fields? Who breathed the gentle breeze which cooled and cheered the drooping flowers? Who has sent us this day so clear, so calm, so bright, "the bridal of the earth and sky"? Who is creating

for us our harvests, and preparing food for man and beast? It is God that does this, doing it in ways beyond our comprehension, yet doing it before our eyes. There is no other force in the universe save that which is derived from God. There is no other life except the life which has leaped from the eternal self-existence. God is in all. Above us in the stars He shines, but He works also in the grass beneath our feet. Each dewdrop gleams His glory, and every grain of dust bears His impress. He is within us, keeping our hearts in motion, and around us, giving to the air we breathe its power to sustain life.

So also is the Lord very near in providence. Albeit that this godless age seeks to banish God, yet is He present in the transactions of every day. All things come of Him, both the little and the great. He ordains, and rules, or over-rules. Pestilence and famine, earthquake and hurricane, are His heavier treads, and days and nights, harvests and springtides, are His gentler footsteps. The events of history, whether on a large or small scale, betray an evident design and arrangement. All things work together, with singular accuracy and punctuality, to accomplish a lofty purpose. It is the fashion nowadays to say that these are *coincidences*. It is a pretty word for boys to play with. Some of us observe God's providences, and we are never without a providence to observe. We see the hand of God in daily life, and we are glad to do so, though we are laughed at as poor fools. Those who can see may well be content to bear the jests of the blind. In my own personal experience I have met with numbers of singular and special tokens of God's working in providence, some of which I would scarce dare to tell, because they might seem incredible. I remember preaching at Halifax, in a huge timber building which was erected for the purpose. During the previous day the snow fell heavily, and it lay deep upon the ground. Nevertheless, the people came in their thousands, and thronged the enormous edifice, and gratefully do I remember how they went away to their homes in safety. They had no sooner cleared the building to the last man, than it fell in one gigantic ruin. Why had it not fallen when the crowds were there? In my joy that no one was harmed I thought that God was there, and I praised His holy name. Was that a piece of superstition?

Take another instance. I was one day in great perplexity upon a certain matter of great importance to the cause of God. I laid it before God in prayer, but still I did not see my way; I could get no direction or guidance. Having to preach in North London, a friend kindly drove me to the spot, and afterwards I asked Him to take me to the house of one of our people whom I wished to see. I scarcely noticed my way, till at last I found myself in a street unknown to me. I then said, "You are surely going wrong." "No," He said, "I am right enough." He was making for the private house of the person I had named, but I knew that he would at that time be at his office in the City, and I had intended to go there after him. We were on the wrong track, and so the horse's head was turned down a side street unknown to me, and as we passed along it, I saw the only man in all the world who could assist me out of my difficulty. How he came to be there I could not tell; how I came to be there I have already told you. Strangely had the Lord guided me, and the information guided the affair to a happy issue. God was near me. *Mere coincidences*, they tell me! *Mere coincidences*! Let me tell a true story. The other day I met with a series of similar "mere coincidences." I set out by railway to a certain town, and the train went on till we came to a junction, and I was bidden to change. By a strange coincidence another train had drawn up, and was going in the direction I desired. I had only time to cross a platform and take my place, and off it went. A few miles further again I heard a voice, saying, "Change here!" I changed a second time, and by another coincidence a train was just starting for my destination. When I reached the end of my railway journey another coincidence was in store for me, for a well-known friend was waiting with his carriage, and he took me to his house, where, by another coincidence, a dinner was ready. At the dinner there happened to be a dish upon the table intended for a person who did not eat meat. Was not this a special coincidence for me? I went to the chapel to preach, and I found it crowded with people anxious to hear; another coincidence, of course! Somebody cries, "You talk nonsense; it was all arranged." I confess I thought so. I am glad that you own the arranging hand, but, pardon me, I saw an arranging hand in the other cases also, and I think it was as clear in the other cases as in this. To the story of my journey you find a clue in a previous arrangement, and in the history of nations, and in the story of each human life, I also find a clue in the presence of a Divine mind which arranges all things. When human arrangement explains a series of events you admit it without question; why not admit Divine arrangement, since it equally well explains the great occurrences of history? Do you object? I fear it is that you resolve not to believe in the one case, while in the other, having no theory to maintain, you follow your natural common sense.

God is so near us that He hears the prayers of His people, and orders events in correspondence to those prayers. Do you doubt this? Do you tell me that the many answers to prayer which we joyfully narrate are *mere coincidences*? I have hardly patience to answer you. Yet let me tell you of some strange incidents which happened to me yesterday. In the morning, when I came into my study, I needed to break my fast. I had scarcely wished it, before my breakfast was on the table. During the day I wished for a glass of water. In a few moments it stood by my side. I required someone to take a telegram to the post office for me. Lo! Presto! A suitable messenger appeared. Was this magic? The evening came on, and I desired to have the lamps lighted and the curtains drawn. In a few seconds my desire was accomplished. Were these matters "mere coincidences"? "No," cries one, "you rang the bell." Now I come to think of it, someone did pull at a handle, but I saw no bell. Yet you assure me that the ringing of a bell accounts for it all. I will not argue the point with you. Only when I yield to you, I want you also to yield to me when I tell you that we pray to the Lord our God, and that we receive answers to our prayers. Our daily experience is that prayer is answered by the Lord our God, for He is near to fulfill His promises, and to grant the petitions of them that put their trust in Him. You believe in the power of the bell, and we believe in the power of prayer. Our speaking to the living God is as much a fact and a reality to us as the ringing of a bell to you; why, then, do you heap scorn upon us? Why do you snuff us out with your big talk about *coincidences*? Scoff away! We shall not pray any the less so long as in our experience we find the Lord so swift to hear, so bountiful to bless. The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God," but even he is not so much a fool as he who, believing that there is a God, will not allow that He is near enough to hear and answer prayer. Oh, that my hearers who doubt the nearness of God would cry to Him, and see if He would not be found of them!

Beloved, the fact is that God is everywhere. He is so present in all places that He is especially near to each person. His circumference is nowhere, but His center is everywhere. God is as much with you as if there were no other person in the world. His being near to you does not make Him far off from another. This truth is high, and we cannot attain to it, but it is none the less sure. God is near each one of us, observing us with exactness, perceiving the secret intents of our hearts. He is near us, feeling for us, and thinking of us. He is near us in active energy, ready to interpose and help us. He is near us in all places, and at all times. By night and by day He surrounds us. At this moment, "surely God is in this place." Know it, and be filled with awe. I pray that, before the service is over, you may know it by feeling the power of His grace. In answer to prayer may the Lord's presence and power be with the words which I shall try to speak to you, though I speak in great feebleness.

First, I am going to address myself for a little *to those who only feel after Him*, but as yet have not perceived Him; and then I shall speak *to those who have found Him*, and who know by a sweet experience how near He is to His chosen.

I. TO THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE FEELING AFTER GOD I speak in deep earnestness. Like blind men who grope for the wall, you stretch out your hands to feel after Him. Rejoice, for He is not far from you!

What then? *How impious is sin* when seen in this light! You have transgressed the commands of the great King in the King's presence. When you blasphemed Him, you thought little of Him, but you spoke into His ear. When you ridiculed His ways and His people, you did it to His face. You insulted your Creator while His eyes were fixed on you. Did you dream that you were in the outskirts of His dominion, far off from His throne? And did you, therefore, take liberty to offend? O sir, you were mistaken; you rebelled in His courts! He heard your evil words; He noted down your unrighteous acts. Think of this, you that have never sought mercy at His hands; from your childhood until now you have lived under His close inspection. You have, perhaps, seen those hives which permit you, through a glass, to see all that the bees are doing. You have watched them busy in their cells. All the world is but a hive of this sort to the mind of God. You could not read the designs and intents of the bees, but the Lord has read your thoughts and imaginations. Would some of you have sinned as you have done if you had realized the Divine presence? Would you have dared to go to such lengths as you have gone, if you had seen Him as He has seen you? "Hush," they say, when they are speaking evil of any person, "here he comes." Why did you not "hush," since God was there? Servants who have wasted their master's time will hurry up when they see that he is near; how is it that you have not only loitered, but done mischief while your

Master has been looking over your shoulder? How impious is that sin which is done despite the presence and observation of God!

Next, note *how profane is indifference!* To be indifferent to God when God is near in the glory of His majesty, and the riches of His love, is a sign of great hardness of heart. God is near, supplying you with breath, keeping you in life, and yet you care not! Holy men have trembled with awe in His presence, and you have trifled! How is this? If He had gone on a journey, and you had forgotten Him, there might be some little excuse, but with the Lord close to you, how could you ignore Him? Can I call this less than sheer profanity? If an angel in the presence of the Most High refused to adore; if a spirit before His burning throne maintained a sullen silence, we should count it unmistakable sedition; what is it in your case? What shall I say to those who here, in the presence of God, have lived ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, and yet have never given their Lord a serious thought? Do you so lightly esteem your Maker? Is He not worth a thought? Will you neither bow your knee in homage, nor lift up your voice in thankfulness? O men and women, why do you act so unjustly, so ungratefully? What has God done that you should slight Him? How can you excuse yourselves, that you live and move in Him, and yet have no more care for Him than if there were no such being?

Furthermore, if God is so near, this shows *the evident impossibility of deceiving Him*. God is not mocked. Do you think that if you will go to God's house that will avail you, though you go not to God? Do you imagine that to repeat certain gracious words will suffice, though your heart is wandering on the mountains of vanity? Have you thought that to make a religious profession will be enough, and that God will be so duped, as to think you His servant and His child, if you take upon yourself the names which belong to such relationships? Do you think that He can be deceived when He is near you, around you, and within you? Your heart is as open to Him as your book is open before you, and He reads you as you read the plainest print. How, then, can you deceive Him? Beware, I beseech you, of having any dealings with God but those which are in downright honesty. We must be true to the core before the All-Seeing One. A lie to our fellow men is meanness, but a lie to God is madness. What do you mean, you pretender to godliness, if your heart is not right with God? Do you think to play tricks with the only wise God? Can you cheat the eyes before which all things are naked and open? He besets you behind and before, and lays His hand upon you; He possesses your reins and searches your heart; be plain and sincere with Him, lest He smite you as He smote Ananias and Sapphira. Oh, that the words of Hagar in the wilderness would rise from every heart—"You God see me"! That God is as near to us as we are to ourselves should make us greatly ashamed, if in any way whatever, we seem to be what, in the depths of our being, we are not.

But, listen! This shows us *how vain is all hope of escape from God!* What if a man says there is no God! God is all the same. What if a man forgets God, and therefore ceases to tremble! There is as much cause for trembling as ever, and somewhat more. What if a man is able throughout life to shut his eyes to his lost estate, and at last dies without bands in his death—what of that? He cannot escape the judgment; he cannot flee from the far-reaching arms of justice. The Lord's impartial sentence will find him out, though he plunge into depths of darkness, or make his bed in hell. It was said once of the whole world that it was nothing better than a prison for the man that had offended Caesar and I may say of the great universe, however wide it is that it is but a narrow cell for the man who has offended God. Where can you fly, my hearer? Where can you hide? Neither mountains nor abysses can conceal you from those eyes of fire! If you had but half a grain of wit you would fall at the feet of your pursuer, and invoke His mercy! Confess your wickedness, and beg for pardon. Quit your sin, and be reconciled to your Judge through the death of His Son; then those eyes shall be suns of light to you, whereas now they are as flames of fire.

This is the solemn side of the matter, and I confess it is dark as the pillar of cloud when it turned its blackness on the Egyptians. Oh, this God! This God who is not far from us! What shall we do? We have provoked Him! He is angry with the wicked every day. His great long-suffering holds back the strokes of His justice, but they must come one day, for He will by no means spare the guilty. Oh, my ungodly hearer, you have sinned, and you are sinning in the presence of your God; I beseech you, think of this! You have been indifferent, and you are still indifferent, in the presence of One, who with a thought can

with you, and with a word can send you where hope can never come. Be warned, I pray you. May God bless this solemn warning to your soul's awakening!

There is a bright side to this great truth of the Divine nearness. If God is not far from each one of us, then *how hopeful is our seeking of Him!* If I seek God, and He is not far from me, I shall surely find Him. I have not to climb to heaven or to dive into the abyss, for He is near! Oh, for faith to perceive Him! Where I sit, or stand, I may come to Him. If I seek Him He is seeking me for certain, or else I should never have sought Him. When the sinner seeks God and God seeks the sinner they will soon meet. Is it not written, "If you seek Him, He will be found of you"? "Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near." Omnipresence yields good cheer to those who are panting for their God.

How perceptible must repentance be! If God is near you, He sees that tear which just now scalded your cheek. He marks that sigh; He sees that heaving of the breast; that trouble of the soul He knows; that restlessness He sees. When I stand by a person who labors under emotion, I am not long before I sympathize with him; I cannot help it; God is much more tender-hearted than we are, and like a father pities his children, so He pities them that fear Him. If your heart is breaking, your God perceives it. If you are bewailing your sin, He hears it, and cries, "How can I give you up?" The sight of your tears has melted Him; the hearing of your sighs has moved His compassion. Doubt not this; you cannot have Him near and yet have Him callous, for His name is Love. He heard you, and He pitied you when yesterday in your chamber you were in an agony of shame and fear. He sees you at this moment in your loneliness and dire distress. A fugitive and a vagabond you may be, but yet the Lord is near.

Since the Lord is near to us, *how quick will He be to perceive our faith!* If you, this morning glance an eye to the cross, the Lord will see your eyes looking that way. He sees the feeble as well as the strong; if you have but a grain of mustard seed of faith He will at once discern it. When the messenger of the church cannot perceive it, and before the minister can detect it, God has seen faith. Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Do you trust yourself with Him? God has accepted your faith and He has said, "There is therefore now no condemnation." If He were far off your faith might be unnoticed, but being close at hand He sees the first glimmer of light within your mind. Though your trust is of the feeblest kind He accepts it and protects it.

If God is so near you, poor soul, *how readily He can reveal Himself to you!* I know how sadly you are urged to despair, and yet before that clock has finished the half-hour your despair may vanish. There is nothing between you and your Savior but your unbelief. Let unbelief go, and you shall see Jesus, to your heart's joy. A prisoner was taken out to die, and as he rode along in the death cart his heart was heavy at the thought of death, and none could cheer him of all the throng. The gallows was in sight, and this blotted out the sun for him. But lo, his prince came riding up in hot haste bearing a free pardon. Then the man opened his eyes, and as though he had risen from the dead, he returned to happy consciousness. The sight of his prince had chased all gloom away. He declared that he had never seen a fairer countenance in all his days, and when he read his pardon he vowed that no poetry should ever be dearer to his heart than those few lines of sovereign grace. Friends, I remember well when I was in that death cart, and Jesus came to me with pardon. Death and hell were before me, but I rejoiced exceedingly when I saw the nail prints in His hands and feet, and the wound in His side. When He said, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you," I thought I never saw such loveliness before, and never heard such music in all my days. No, it was not mere thought, I am sure my judgment was right. Eternity itself shall never disclose anything to me more sweet. My pardoning Lord has no peer or rival. Oh, what a Christ is He who appeared to me, a guilty, condemned sinner, on the way to hell! Blessed be His name, He bore on the tree my curse, and shame, and death, and I am free! This is the manifestation which I desire for each of you, and since Jesus is near, how readily can He grant you the gift!

If the Lord is near, there is no reason why He should not grant pardon right now to all of you who seek it. Before the words I speak have reached your ear, God, in the person of His Son, may manifest Himself to you, and make your heart leap for joy. Do it, O Lord Jesus! Grant a vision of Yourself, good Lord; grant it now, and You shall have the praise. God often reveals Himself by men to men; why should He not speak to you through this sermon of mine? God often reveals Himself to men by the Scriptures. A precious text laid home to an aching heart will soon give it peace. Wherefore, be of good

cheer, my hearer; God is near you, and therefore hope is near you. Believe in Jesus, and He will give you rest. He waits to be gracious; He looks out for objects of mercy. Be of good cheer, for Jesus of Nazareth passes by. Even at this hour He is near.

II. The time is too short; therefore I must turn at once to God's people, and speak to **THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE FOUND THE LORD**. Brothers, you need not that I seek out choice words when I speak to *you*. You are soldiers, and you only want short sentences, such as captains give to the ranks. I say to you, redeemed by precious blood, and made sensitive to the all-surrounding God, note *how strictly God observes us!* Let us walk in His sight, let us live in His presence. I charge you, remember that the Lord your God is a jealous God. Under such weighty obligations to Him, and bound to Him by such marvelous ties of love, live—live obediently, live intensely, live with concentration of heart, and mind, and strength; live wholly unto Him. Being ever in His sight set Him always before you. Be your life such as life should be in the fierce light that beats about the throne of Deity. Oh, our poor lives! Our empty lives! God fill them and elevate them! May He help us to rise out of our dead selves by a sense of His living presence. If God's nearness does not make us cry to Him to make men of us, what will? O You who are so divinely near, draw our lives into Your life!

If God is not far from us, let us see *how readily He hears our prayers!* I am sometimes startled at the power of a feeble prayer to win a speedy answer. "Startled," you will say; why am I startled, for it is written, "Before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Yes, it is so written, but we do not always apprehend the fact. When the promise comes speedily to pass, have you never felt your flesh creep with a solemn awe in the presence of God, who has so remarkably drawn near at the voice of prayer? You turn aside from your business but a minute and pray, and you come back calm and composed. This is the finger of God. You do not leave the counter, but simply dart a glance heavenward, and the thing you sought for is bestowed upon you. Is it not often so, my beloved? You know it is. Is it not easily accounted for by the fact that God is at your right hand, ready to be gracious? There is no need in every case to break the continuity of business, and to get away from the concerns of this life, for the Lord is in the shop, and in the barn, as well as in the closet. You are in the midst of a throng of wicked men, but God is there too, if His providence has called you into such company. The pressure of incessant occupation racks your mind, but it would be less if you felt that God is there to help and guide.

How simple is communion with the Lord when we know that He is near us! When you seek quietude for meditation, do you think it wonderful that you enter speedily into communion with God? Is He not waiting for you? If you go into the field with Isaac, God is there. Resort, therefore, to communion with God without doubt of obtaining it. Speak, for He hears; listen, for He speaks. Pray without ceasing, because God is near without ceasing. Pour out your heart before Him, for He is ever near to mark your heart's outpourings. It makes life a blessed thing when we remember that we spend it with God. We dwell in Him. It is not as if we were visitors, and had to make calls on God now and then, but He is our dwelling place. We have not to seek Him as though He had hidden Himself away, for He is the sun whose presence fills our life with strength and comfort. He is in us, and therefore with us. Therefore let us pray, and praise, and hold sweet communion with Him.

Further, dear brethren, if God is so near us, *how securely are we defended!* A Christian lady not long ago dreamed a dream which was not a dream, but fact. She saw herself as surrounded with God; encircled above, beneath, and all around, as with a blaze of light. Brilliance inconceivable made a pavilion for her, and while she stood in the midst of the glory she saw all her cares, and her troubles, and her temptations, and her sins, wandering about the outside of the wall of light, unable to reach her. Unless that light itself should open and make a way for them she was serenely secure, although she could see the perils which otherwise would destroy her. Is not the Lord a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst? Is it not written, "He that dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty"? Evil shall not come near to him who is near to God. Go where we may, a more than royal guard surrounds us, for the Lord of Hosts is with us. Blind eyes, blind eyes, you see not the Infinite Protector! If our eyes were anointed, we should see the mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about us; no, better than horses, though they are of fire, we would see the omnipotent God to be our shield and buckler. I want you, dear people of God, to feel that you are never in real danger, because never far from God. How can he be in peril that the Lord keeps both night and day?

To the living God we look for life when threatened by the powers of death. You have a little fish in your hand; it will soon die if it remains there. It is newly taken from the stream; make haste to restore it to its element, and it will speedily recover. In the river it will find all it needs; even so, in God we have all we want. In God we dwell in all-sufficiency and in perfect peace. As the dove in the dovecote, and the coney in the rock, and the chick beneath the hen, so do we dwell in God. Who is he that can harm us, since God is near?

If the Lord is thus near us, *how speedily He can renew our graces!* Alas! Our souls too often need restoring, but blessed be His name, He is at hand to renew our life. I confess with shame that I have felt dull and dead and heavy, and I thought it was the weather, or my bodily weakness, or some other matter, but whatever was the cause, I have only found one cure. As in a moment, quicker than the twinkling of an eye, I have been lifted into life, and love, and light, and energy; I have awakened in the night with all the bells of my soul ringing out peals of praise. I have said to myself, "What a strange creature I am! Now I can rejoice in my God; now I can pray with holy prevalence; now I can leap as a hart." Then I have wished to rush into the pulpit and preach straight away. I was all death before, and the Lord made me all life. Is not this to be expected since God is near to hear our moans? He speaks, and it is done. "His word runs very swiftly." By the exercise of faith the Lord enables us to overcome the body. Plato used to say that by thought the soul could get out of the body. I am not philosopher enough to know whether this is true or not; indeed, I never tried to quit my body, for I am afraid I might not find my way back again, but this I know, that by the spiritual life the spirit can rise above the body. Some grievous ache, some bitter pain has made you feel as if you did not care to live, and yet a flash of sacred joy has gone through you, and you have laughed at the pain, and have even been quickened by it. Pain is a rough barebacked steed which throws every common rider, but when he comes who is taught by the Spirit, he leaps upon it, rides it, and outstrips the wind. How many a grand thought has been the child of pain. Now, if God is with us we see how such a thing can be. Never despair while the living God is near. Believe in the living One, and touching the hem of His garment, the virtue of His life shall stream into your dying heart, "He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

I hear people sometimes talk about "the higher life." Happy is that man who obtained the highest life when he first believed in Jesus Christ. The Divine life is neither lower nor higher, but there are increasing degrees of its strength. These are all reachable; for God is near to help us. If God is near us, brothers, infinite resources are near us. We need not be unbelieving; we need not be sorrowful; we need not be afraid. We need not be the captives of sin; we are able to overcome it by the Divine help. We can master ourselves, for God is near us to give us the victory.

I do not think that any of you should go away today, saying, "I feel so dull, so stupid, so unspiritual." God is not far from any one of us, and His presence should remove these complaints. What does Jesus say? "I am the resurrection, and the life." You looked for a miracle. Behold your Lord! He is the miracle. Receive Him, and you have the resurrection and the life. What though you are in the grave, sheeted and bound; if Jesus is at the mouth of the sepulcher, at His bidding you shall quit the abode of death. Have hope, O Lazarus! For though you are dead and stinking, yet the Christ who calls you gives you life. Never, child of God, never think that you cannot be filled with life and power. That cry of, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" is heard by your present God, and He gives you the victory through Jesus Christ.

Let me say once more, if God is so near us, *there is no reason why we should not speedily enjoy a manifestation of His glory.* Moses keeps the flock of Jethro. Poor comrades, those woolly sheep! He has led them to the back side of the desert. Poor region, it scarcely yields a blade of grass for sheep, and nothing for man. What can one expect in a howling wilderness? Stop; yonder is a bush! But what of that? No grapes or figs can be gathered there. A bird may rest in a bush, but not a man. Turn you aside, O Moses, for God can make that bush to be the throne of Deity! The commonplace can be made celestial, the despicable, divine. Though today, dear heart, in all your trouble and deadness of heart you will go to a home which is no home, yet since God is there He can appear to you in anything and everything. He can make the bush of your trouble to become the embodiment of His glory. He can manifest Himself to you as He does not to the world. Time was, they say, when God could be found under a tree, and by the brook, and near the town wall, and even in a furnace, and a lion's den, but men do not see Him now

even in temples. Whose fault is this? It is the fault of our dull eye, and duller hearts. God is as near as ever. I see Him in this house of prayer. I pray that you may see Him, and then the spot whereon you now are will become holy ground to you throughout the rest of your life. In your quiet room this afternoon, there is no reason why a door should not be opened in heaven. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." He shows His glory to the meek and lowly. The recognized presence of God will make an attic as glorious as the Mount of Transfiguration. When Jesus is to us Emanuel, God with us, we see Him in His glory, for this is to see Him as He is.

This truth of the presence of God makes me feel happy with regard to this my much beloved church. I often fear lest we should not have conversions. I have feared lest coldness of heart should take hold of myself and you, and then this has been my comfort—the Lord is not far from any of us, and therefore He can use us, and work conversions in our midst. Brethren, He can incline the outsiders to come and hear the word, and when they hear it He can bless them, for He is not far from them. I read in the Life of John Wesley a story of Methodists meeting in a barn, and how certain of the villagers, who were afraid to break through the door, resolved to place one inside who would open the door to them during the service, that they might disturb the congregation. This person went in before service began, and concealed himself in a sack in a corner of the barn. When the Methodists began to sing, he liked the tune so well that he would not get out of the sack till he had heard it through. Then followed a prayer, and during that prayer, God worked on the man in the sack, so that he began to cry for mercy. The good people looked around, and were astonished to find a sinner in a sack seeking his Savior. The door was not opened to the mob after all, for he who intended to do so was converted. It does not matter why the people come to hear the gospel; God can bless them in any case. If Christ is preached, men will be saved, even if they come to disturb. "Sir," said one to me, "I had been to bargain about a pair of ducks on Sunday morning, and I passed by the door, and I thought I would just look in. There and then the Lord met with me, and those ducks were forgotten, for I found a Savior." God is not far from any, and in answer to believing prayer He can deal with men and turn their hearts to Himself. Therefore, work on! Go round with your tracts this afternoon. God is not far away from those houses. Stand in the street corner and preach; God is not far away from those who pass by. Go to your Sunday school class, for God is not far from any one of the children. Work with cheerful hope, for the Lord is near you.

This presence of God which cheers in life, also sustains in death. He is not far from any one of us when all the world flies far away. This morning the end came suddenly to our friend Mr. Murphy. He hoped to preach this morning, but he is doing better work. His congregation is gathered expecting their pastor; may they find the Master with them, though the servant is gone! If God is always near, what does it matter whether we die or live? We would like to have our friends gathered about our bed to bid them farewell, but perhaps, it will not be so. It is of small moment, after all, since our God will be near. Our best Friend will be there; our Father will be there, for our God will be there. Go your way and make no bargain as to whether you live or die; only plead that promise, "Certainly I will be with you." God is with us now, and soon we shall be with Him. Until the day break and the shadows flee away, abide with us, O Lord. Amen, and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 139.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—230, 185, 211.

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